TL 6007

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Member of the Second Chamber of the
Dutch Parliament for the Labour Party

Spokesman on Indonesia (foreign affairs and development cooperation)

Furtheron Spohesman on :
- Latin-America
- Africa
- Arms-transfer & control
- Transport & traffic

1977-1981 Chairman Labour party Young Socialist

1982-1987 Chairman of the Labour Party in Amsterdam

Contribution v. Gijzel

From neutrality to activity

After the occupation of East-Timor by the Indonesian military forces the Netherland Goverment is representing the Portuguese interests in the archipelago.
This development led to a neutral position of the Dutch Government in the conflict. It was seen that only a neutral position of the Netherlands was appropriate when representing Portuguese interests. However this neutrality led in fact to passivity. In the last 2 to 3 years this passive position has changed only slightly. It may be good to discuss some of the recent political developments in the Netherlands related to East-Timor.

On February 15th 1990 again 4 people were executed in Indonesia who were sentenced to death more than 20 years ago. Because of this execution I immediately asked our Foreign Minister a report on the human rights situation in Indonesia. This report contained the following analyses.

"At present it is not likely that the negotiations under the auspices of the SG-UN will lead to concrete results soon. The Netherlands - because of its position as representative of the Portugese interests - is taking a neutral position. The human rights situation in 1989 has worsened. The situation can still be characterized as somewhat tense."

Furthermore the Report is describing some developments regarding East-Timor which are characterized as positive such as the higher accessability of the island since 1989, changes in the military situation and socio-economic progress in the fields of infrastructure and education. It is perceived as positive that a good relation had developed between the clerical authorities of Dili and Djakarta.

On march 18th this year the Second Chambre of the Dutch Parliament has debated policies regarding Indonesia. All political parties demanded a more constructive role and a more active position of the Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding the East-Timor issue.
The spokesman of the governing Christian-Democrating Party said in the debat: "There seems to be a stalemate. It must be said, the position of Portugal was not always clear in the past. Nevertheless we have to ask ourselves wich possibilities the Netherlands or the EC has to put the situation in East-Timor higher on the political agenda."

My own party, the Social-Democrats stated that (I quote) "Regarding East-Timor the Netherlands should no longer maintain its neutral position, although the Indonesian government would react negatively to this. Neutrality too often leads to passivity.

The largest opposition party, the conservative oriented Liberal party stated: "The Netherlands can - because of its special position - play the role of a katalyst in stimulating talks between de UN, the Portuguese government, Indonesia and

a representative delegation of the East-Timorian population."

These 3 parties together have 125 of the 150 seats in the Dutch Parliament. A clear majority the Foreign Minister cannot ignore.

However it should be noted that the Foreign Minister himself has played a very reserved role in the last couple of years. Regarding Indonesia he is a proponent of "silent diplomacy" as the most effective way to relate to Indonesia. At the same time however Minister Van den Broek declamed during the debat, forced by the pressure of the different parties, that: "neutrality should not lead to inactivity. The declaration of the General Assembly of the UN are still valid." Furthermore he stated that Indonesia and Portugal don't see a reason for putting the question on the UN-Agenda and therefore the Netherlands, with its specific relations between Portugal on one and Indonesia on the other hand, should not pursue this issue in the UN against the will of these countries". He also said that: "The Dutch activities however should not be directed towards prolonging the present situation. If the international community is not ready to take further steps, it cannot be expected from the Netherlands that it takes a more farreaching role at this moment."

In short. The Dutch Government still takes the UN as central point of departure for its policies, but hides itself behind the international community and especially Portugal when it comes to executing General Assembly decisions.

A clearly stated political position of Portugal becomes in this way a precondition for any progress in this matter.

This creates a difficult position for the Dutch Government.

The Dutch Government is Chairman of the IGGI and in the second half of 1991 also of the EC.

It is therefore essential that we bring our government to a more active stage.

In that case we have to take away the opportunity argument of our government that if the Portuguese do not want more public pressure, why would we - the Dutch Government -want more public pressure.

Since the Gulf War in the Netherlands the discussion on the role of the UN has intensified. More attention is paid to the new international legal order and the need to settle "old" questions on which the UN has a clear position, such as East-Timor. The role of publicity is here extremely important. Journalists who are interested in active and objective reporting on East-Timor can play an important role. Such reporting is indispensable for putting East-Timor on the politfcal agenda and change present policies.

Our long historical relation with Indonesia had created a situation in wich every Dutch public statement is put under a magnifying glass.

This explanes in part the cautious position of our government.

East Timor could - it seems to me - be an exeption in this respects, as this doesn't relate directly to our mutual historical relation. In terms of international law, the case

of East-Timor is clear.

The only question now is how the principals of international law can be applied and lead to positive results. Each memberstate of the UN has the obligation to actively pursue this application of international legal obligation into reality.

It is Portugal, because of its special status as assigned to it by the UN, that has a keyrole to play in this respect.